LEARNING for CHANGE AND INNOVATION

WORLD CONGRESS
7-9 NOVEMBER 2016 ADELAIDE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA

CONGRESS SUPPORTERS
HOW CAN AN ORGANISATION LEARN ITS WAY TO BECOMING ‘SUSTAINING’?

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

• Increase appreciation of the role of emergent change in organisational transformation.
• Identify the salient personal development of researcher and co-researchers that enabled emergent change.
• Identify conversation as a form of action in action research.
• Identify threshold concepts involved in the emergent change.
• Identify leverage points for change within the case study organisation.
• Introduce the research

• Salient research findings:
  • Researcher
  • Co-researchers
  • Organisation

• Principles for wider application
• The role of organisations in resolving global ‘unsustainability’.

• ‘Weak’ and ‘strong’ sustainability (REF).
3 WAVES OF CHANGE TO FORM A SUSTAINING ORG

1st wave
• Value destroyers
• Value limiters

2nd wave
• Value conservers
• Value creators

3rd wave
• Sustaining organisation
• “reinterprets the nature of the corporation to an integral renewing element of the whole society in its ecological context.”

Dunphy et.al., *Organizational Change for corporate sustainability*, 2007
A FUNDAMENTAL SHIFT IN PARADIGM

• Thinking and acting in the world in a way that recognises the interdependence of everything. (Senge, 2014)

• Seeing and working in ‘wholes’

• More than a cerebral understanding. Whole people – mind, body, spirit.

Complex adaptive systems – ‘living systems’
OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

• Employed the lens of complex adaptive systems

• Systemic and emergent action research over 2 years (2010 – 2012)

• Local government body
  • 450 employees
  • CEO support – tentative executive team support
  • Small co-research group
ABOUT THE CO-RESEARCH GROUP

• Formation – open to all with an interest.

• Core group of 5 established – only 1 with senior authority. Up to 12 different members over the research period.

• Met fortnightly for 2 hours over 2 years

•Meetings ‘unstructured’ but focused on the research question
CASE STUDY FINDINGS

- First person: influencing
- Subtle nature of distributed leadership
  - Indirect cause and effect
  - Impact over time and space
- Personal qualities
  - Developed my capacity
  - Let go of ‘right’
  - Ambiguity
  - Humility
  - Courage
- Systemic awareness
- Influencing the ‘flow’ of energy
- The sum of distributed leadership
- ‘Dancing with the system’ (Meadows)
CASE STUDY FINDINGS

Second person: co-research group

Threshold concepts (Meyer and Land)

- Complexity and emergence
- Understanding sustainability
- Mental models
- Self permission
- Personal values
- Trace influence in hindsight
- Practices
- Understandings
- Language
- Common
- Invisible and influential
- Co-research group
- Personal & professional development
- Skill development
- Self actualisation (Maslow)
- Confidence
- Dialogue
- Inquiry
- Self
- Group
- Self sustained members
CASE STUDY FINDINGS

3 key leverage points:

1. Co-created shared vision
   - Clear line of sight to the vision
   - "clear the decks"

2. Fear of speaking up
   - Engagement at level of vision and values

3. Strategic planning process
   - Second person: organisation
GUIDING PRINCIPLES

• Researcher/facilitator to be guided by an understanding of the behaviour of complex adaptive systems.
• Guide conversations to develop an understanding of the identified threshold concepts.
• Unplanned conversations are the ‘action’ and catalyst for the paradigm shift to emerge – in good time.
• Nurture the liberation of personal values.
• Generate and nurture a co-created shared vision.
• Less is more.
CONNECTING TO YOUR EXPERIENCES

• How has a participative action research process developed you and others? Has it expanded your consciousness?

• In what ways does this case study reflect your own experiences with emergent change?

• What are the more subtle realms of emergent change in your experience?